

Readers' Advisory

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A Look Back at ALA Annual 2025

Craig Clark

Library conferences are a great way to discover new resources, further continuing education, network, and develop lasting friendships in the library world. I attended the ALA Annual 2025 Conference and Exhibition in Philadelphia this year, and I was continually amazed and invigorated by the excitement and enthusiasm of the attendees, speakers, and presenters. In today's political environment, it is easy to get bogged down with threats to the library world, including censorship and budget cuts, but being among friends and colleagues can reinvigorate professional optimism toward this very noble and important field of librarianship in all its forms. As a Readers' Advisory (RA) librarian, I focused on programs and vendors that promoted RA services, but I also took some time to explore groups that worked for librarians and the public to battle the increasing number of organized book-banning groups accosting our right to read. The following is an overview of popular programs and exhibits that caught my interest.

PROGRAMS for the RA Librarian

Library Love Fest – The HarperCollins Library Marketing Team

The undisputed champion of book talks is the group at HarperCollins. Their events are entertaining and sometimes raucous, and their video presentations online are brilliant. Check out their website for access to e-galleys, previews of forthcoming titles, and hilarious videos. Kudos to Virginia Stanley, Lainey Mays, and Grace Caternolo for their dedicated work.

Library Reads – Multiple Programs

Nonfiction You Can't Put Down – This United for Libraries author panel, moderated by Rebecca Vnuk of Library Reads, was informative and entertaining. Authors spoke a bit about their books and were available for a book signing after the panel. The authors included Char Adams (*Black-Owned*, Penguin Random House), Irin Carmon (*Unbearable*, Simon & Schuster), Elizabeth R. Hyman (*The Girl Bandits of the Warsaw Ghetto*, HarperCollins), and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (*The Trafficker Next Door*, W. W. Norton & Co.).

ALMA/LibraryReads Speculative Fiction Adult Author Panel – Authors included Alix E. Harrow, *The Everlasting* (Tor Books); Kirsten Miller, *The Women of Wild Hill* (William Morrow); K. X. Song, *The Dragon Wakes with Thunder* (Ace); Becky Siegel Spratford, *Why I Love Horror: Essays on Horror Literature* (Saga Press); and Andrew Joseph White, *You Weren't Meant to Be Human* (Saga Press).

LibraryReads is a great resource for librarians and staff to read about current popular titles. From their website: Rather than picking "the best" of anything, LibraryReads represents collective favorites—the books library staff loved reading and cannot wait to share. There are no judges or juries. ([See our infographic!](#)) Participation is open to everyone who works in a public library, whether

senior staff or new arrivals, in any area of the library. LibraryReads is designed to be inclusive and diverse, representing a broad range of reading tastes and showcasing a variety of new titles, including buzzed-about debuts, genre favorites, bestselling authors, and lesser-known midlist titles that public library staff are raving about.

Booklist Magazine – Read n’ Rave

Most, if not all, librarians are familiar with *Booklist Magazine*. Their Read n’ Rave program, moderated by Susan McGuire, rivals Library Love Fest for entertainment value. A panel of librarians presents a rapid-fire look at their favorite titles from the exhibit floor. A link to all the titles mentioned is available from the Read n’ Rave link above.

United for Libraries – Author Panels at ALA Annual

In addition to the nonfiction panel, United for Libraries presented several other panels, including First Novels, Love Stories, and Thrills and Chills. These panels offer not only a look at forthcoming titles, but they also allow librarians to listen to the authors’ motivations and back stories.

Andrew Carnegie Medals for Excellence in Fiction and Nonfiction

Selected each year by a panel of librarians, bookstore owners, and ALA staff, the Carnegie Medal represents the best in literary fiction and nonfiction. ALA’s website lists the winners, finalists, and longlist, a great resource for RA librarians for the literary-minded reader. The combination of the Carnegie Medal, RUSA/CODES Notable Books Council, and the Reading List, librarians have access to highly curated adult reading lists representing literary and genre titles. (Disclaimer: I am a member of this year’s Reading List committee, and I believe this and Notables are underutilized and under-marketed resources for librarians.)

Literary Luminaries: Celebrating the Best Reading of the Year

Sponsored by Ingram Library Services, this is another program that allows librarians access to authors in a fun setting. “What could be better than books and baked pastries? Maybe signed books and baked pastries? Join your fellow readers and book lovers and listen to some of the year’s best authors from RUSA book and media award winners and Best of Lists Authors as they discuss their works and the craft of writing as well as sign books” (from the conference description).

Authors included:

Anne Byrn, author of *Baking in the American South: 200 Recipes and Their Untold Stories*

Ari Fliakos, narrator of *I’m Starting to Worry about this Black Box of Doom*

Chris Health, author of *Improbable Escape from the Nazis and the Tangled Way We Tell the Story of the Holocaust*

Helen Laser, narrator of *All This and More*

Diane McKinney-Whetstone, author of *Family Spirit*

Yume Kitasei, author of *The Stardust Grail*

Penguin Random House Gala Author Tea sponsored by Overdrive

This is a very popular long-running event at ALA. Enjoy tea and treats while hearing from bestselling writers about their forthcoming titles during this annual United for Libraries event. Featured authors will include Mary Roach (*Replaceable You*), Lily King (*Heart the Lover*), Sarah Penner (*The Amalfi Curse*), Catherine Newman (*Wreck*), and Sam Sussman (*Boy from the North Country*). Attendees will receive advance copies and have the opportunity to have them signed by authors (signed books and advance copies are subject to availability). Moderated by *Booklist*'s Donna Seaman (from the conference description).

A Few RA-related Booths

The exhibition floor offers a great opportunity for librarians to discover resources for their RA toolbox. It is also a space for introductions and networking for those who aspire to write reviews, contribute articles, and learn about current offerings from database companies and publishers. Below is a sampling of the booths I visited. I make a point to visit the publishers' booths not for the free books and swag (so much swag), but to ask them which titles they are excited about for the fall. An exhibitor list is available [here](#). It includes links to individual companies.

I currently write reviews for *Booklist*, and I subscribe to *Library Journal* for their RA content. I also try to browse *Publishers Weekly* and *Kirkus Reviews* (for the stars and snarky final lines). I did not include them in the following description because of the assumption that readers will be familiar with them. However, take some time to browse their sites for read-alikes, feature articles, and curated lists. A good readers' advisor is always building on their knowledge base and making connections to expand their ability to connect readers to their books.

BookPage Magazine

For more than 30 years, *BookPage* has been a trusted source for book reviews, recommendations, and author interviews. Our monthly book review and recommendation guide, available in both print and digital editions, reaches a nationwide audience of more than **400,000 avid readers** through our **3,500 subscribing public libraries and bookstores**. BookPage highlights intriguing new voices as well as anticipated bestsellers, pointing readers to the best new releases across all genres, including historical fiction, literary fiction, popular fiction, mysteries and thrillers, nonfiction, biography and memoir, romance, cozies, audiobooks, lifestyles, children's, young adult, and more (from their website).

BookBrowse: Your Guide to Exceptional Books

BookBrowse is your guide to exceptional books, providing you with all you need to know about the books that matter. For more than two decades, BookBrowse has provided a curated resource of the best in contemporary fiction and nonfiction, with an emphasis on books that not only engage and entertain but also deepen our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. We offer free and premium content, with subscription options for individuals and libraries (so that all patrons and staff can access the content). Because there are far too many books published for you to read *about* all of them, let alone read them all, we seek out and recommend only the best of the best. Then, we give you all the information you need to decide which books are just right for you. BookBrowse provides in-depth reviews and "beyond the book" articles; hand-selected read-alike recommendations for thousands of books and authors; the ability to browse by genre, time period, setting, and a wide range of themes; previews of notable books to be published soon; and extensive resources for book clubs. We also publish four [free newsletters](#) (*BookBrowse Highlights*,

Publishing This Week, *Book Club News*, and *Librarian News*) and, for our members, a twice-monthly e-magazine, *The BookBrowse Review*.

Forward Reviews

From their website: Since our inception in 1998, *Foreword Reviews* has never strayed from its mission to help booksellers and librarians discover great books from indie presses. At a time when the trade media devoted nearly all its attention to the larger corporate publishers like Random House and Simon & Schuster, the debut of *Foreword Reviews* introduced a new stream of quality reviews of independently published books to the wholesalers and distributors where booksellers and librarians order their books. The United States has always recognized the importance of a fiercely independent press—one that embraces freedom of thought, multiculturalism, religious diversity, and an understanding that the profit motive shouldn't be the only criterion used when deciding whether to publish a book. The fact that Foreword's business model was built around indie presses caused many heads to turn in the book industry.

The Library of Congress

An unlikely source for readers' advisory material, the Library of Congress website is nonetheless a great resource to explore. There are links to individual states' Center for the Book, and although the National Book Festival will have taken place before the publication of this article, articles and information on past festivals are available.

NoveList

As many of you know, EBSCO's NoveList is the premier database for readers available today. The combination of metadata librarians, curated content, and expert recommendations makes it an invaluable resource for RA librarians. From their website: NoveList began with a problem many library workers face every day—that the world of books is too vast for one person's memory. The original idea back in 1994 was to create a database that would be a "secret weapon" for keeping track of all the great books out there to recommend. Today, we still offer that original secret weapon, plus so much more. Thirty years later, we remain committed to our core mission of connecting books, readers, and libraries.

Readers' Advisory Adjacent – Censorship and Book Bans

Recently, there has been an increasing number of book challenges in libraries. This is a concerted effort that often can be overwhelming to librarians, especially in small systems. The following groups presented programs or had a booth in the exhibit hall, and they offer assistance, tools, and strategies to combat the banning of books.

Intellectual Freedom Awards – Intellectual Freedom Round Table (IFRT)

I had the pleasure of attending the awards ceremony for the IFRT. Organized by the Freedom to Read Foundation and the Illinois School of Information Sciences, this program highlighted several individuals dedicated to supporting intellectual freedom.

The Intellectual Freedom Round Table (IFRT) provides a forum for the discussion of activities, programs, and problems in intellectual freedom of libraries and librarians; serves as a channel of communications on intellectual freedom matters; promotes a greater opportunity for involvement among the members of the ALA in defense of intellectual freedom; and promotes a greater feeling of responsibility in the implementation of ALA policies on intellectual freedom (from their website).

Books Unbanned – Brooklyn Public Library

Inspired by the American Library Association's **Freedom to Read Statement** and the **Library Bill of Rights**, Brooklyn Public Library founded Books Unbanned in 2022 to support the rights of teens nationwide to read what they like, form their own opinions, and work together with peers across the nation to defend and expand the freedom to read.

Books Unbanned responds to an increasingly coordinated and effective effort to remove books tackling a wide range of topics from library shelves in schools and public libraries nationwide. Partnering libraries provide free digital library cards to teens across the country to enhance access to frequently banned materials and support the freedom to read (from their website).

United Against Book Bans – An Initiative of the American Library Association

With more than 200 partner organizations and tens of thousands of individual supporters, Unite Against Book Bans connects, equips, and mobilizes the public to advocate in their communities for the right to read and to defeat attempts at every level of government to censor reading material.

Unite represents the **overwhelming majority of Americans** who believe in the freedom to read. Our coalition members are readers, parents, students, educators, librarians and library workers, authors, publishers, community and advocacy organizations, businesses and workers, nonprofits, faith groups, elected officials, civic leaders, and other concerned people who stand ready to oppose censorship (from their website).

United for Libraries – Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends and Foundations United for Libraries is a national network of enthusiastic library supporters who believe in the importance of libraries as the social and intellectual centers of communities and campuses. No one has a stronger voice for libraries than those who use them, raise money for them, and govern them. By uniting these voices, library supporters everywhere will become a real force to be reckoned with at the local, state, and national levels (from their website).

Library conferences are a vital part of an RA librarian's continuing education and growth in the field. Whether in-person or virtual, regional or national, taking the time to build a knowledge base in Readers' Advisory services, understanding issues and concerns within the field, and meeting with peers and colleagues will make you a more effective librarian.